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ABSTRACT

Since New York State's Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) program was enacted, New York City has made tremendous strides in providing quality early childhood education to its children. Noting that the legislative requirements for UPK are designed to foster collaboration with community-based organizations, this report discusses the need for collaborative leadership in early education as affirmed in a 2002 forum of stakeholders in New York City's UPK program. This forum offered community school districts and community-based organizations the opportunity to share technical strategies for collaborative implementation of the UPK program in New York City. The topics covered included budgeting techniques, contracting requirements, and strategies for effective recruitment and enrollment. The forum also helped to surface some of the remaining obstacles to collaboration, emphasizing the continued need for communication, flexibility, and openness. The mutual commitment of all partners to collaboration, agreed the speakers, was the critical ingredient in bringing quality early childhood education to the children of New York City. The report concludes with a list of resources on UPK in New York City and a list of members of the Early Childhood Strategic Group. (KB)

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Collaborative Leadership

A Forum On Universal Prekindergarten

June 11 2002, UJA Federation

by Amy Cooper

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This report was prepared by the Early Childhood Strategic Group Resource Center. The ECSG is a partnership of organizations and individuals who are dedicated to creating a comprehensive and fully integrated early care and education system in New York City. Through its Resource Center, the ECSG offers resources and information to the field. It also works with the Emergency Coalition to Save Universal Prekindergarten, the statewide Center for Early Care and Education, and The Alliance for Quality Education to work toward a unified early care and education system.

Since Universal Prekindergarten legislation was passed in the summer of 1997, the ECSG has worked to support full implementation of this program to ensure that all children have access to essential early learning opportunities. We have produced reports on many aspects of the implementation process, including blended funding policy, cost allocation, workforce availability, community-based organization (CBO)/ Community School District (CSD) relations, the UPK Advisory Board process, and parents' responses to UPK.

The ECSG recognizes the significance of the new partnerships between the public school system and early childhood programs in the community. The New York City school system purchases services from these organizations and engages them in planning for UPK. The partners are also jointly pursuing quality early learning by advancing professional development opportunities across all settings. There are few precedents for these partnerships. As stakeholders redefine relationships between the early childhood community and the public school system, Universal Prekindergarten provides a fertile opportunity to nurture and support meaningful collaborations. The forum described here represents one step in that effort.

The Forum on Collaborative Leadership was co-sponsored by the Office of Early Childhood Education of the New York City school system and the ECSG. We thank Eleanor Greig Ukoli, Director of that office, and her staff for their energetic stewardship of the UPK program in New York City, a true success story in early childhood education. Thank you to Charles Paprocki for his continued efforts on behalf of the Early Childhood Strategic Group and for editing this report. Finally, we thank the panelists and participants at the Forum, and all of the many directors, administrators and teachers in the Universal Prekindergarten program, for their inspiring commitment to collaborative leadership.

Collaborative Leadership
A Forum on Universal Prekindergarten

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Universal Prekindergarten: A Turning Point

Since New York State's Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) program was enacted in 1997, New York City has made tremendous strides in providing quality early childhood education to its children. The UPK program calls for developmentally appropriate early education for every four-year-old, to be offered for 2½ hours per day for the duration of the school year. This year over 43,000 children in New York City alone will receive early childhood education in UPK programs.

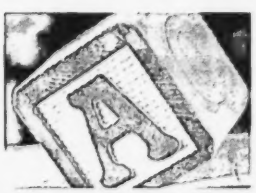
The UPK legislation was designed to foster collaboration, requiring that, at minimum, ten percent of services be offered outside public school settings. Under the leadership of Eleanor Greig Ukoli, Director of the Office of Early Childhood Education at the New York City school system, New York City has far exceeded this mandate. Seventy percent of the city's UPK children will be served in community-based organizations (CBOs), with the remaining participating in UPK in the public schools. The rich array of programs already offering early childhood education and care have served as a critical launching point for UPK expansion in the city. By directing UPK funds to existing Head Start, Preschool Special Education, family child care programs, private nursery schools, and child care programs funded by the Agency for Child Development, the city has been able to serve more children, extend the hours of care, and enhance the quality of existing programs. Through these many UPK partnerships, New York City has also taken the next step toward a unified, high-quality early childhood education system.

Collaborative Leadership

On June 11, 2002 stakeholders in New York City's UPK program came together to affirm their commitment to a genuine partnership in implementation of the UPK program. This partnership approach, which we have called "Collaborative Leadership," involves groups pooling their time, energy and assets to tackle difficult challenges. Collaborative leaders work together across sectors or organizations, and commit to broad-based participation and inclusive decision-making. In many ways, the unique partnerships forged by New York City's Community School Districts and Community-Based Organizations epitomize Collaborative Leadership. In other respects, both groups must continue to work hard to build the integrated, high-quality early childhood education program needed for New York City's children.

The "Collaborative Leadership" forum was intended as a step towards this ideal. It was co-hosted by the Early Childhood Strategic Group and the Office of Early Childhood Education. The over 200 participants represented all UPK partners, including public agencies, Community School Districts, the New York City school system, and a broad cross-section of UPK providers. Speakers, including **Harvey Newman**, Deputy Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services, and Eleanor Greig Ukoli, Director of the Office of Early Childhood Education at the New York City school system, credited mutual respect and inclusive decision-making among these stakeholders for the program's many successes to date.

The Forum also provided a critical opportunity for the community to identify remaining obstacles to program expansion. As CBO providers reach the final year of their three-year UPK contracts, significant efforts are still needed to eliminate administrative redundancies; allow for greater program flexibility; and improve communication between the central New York City school system, the Community School Districts (CSDs), and the community based organizations (CBOs) providing care to children. Specific issues identified by participants included confusing and inconsistent contracting requirements across Districts, particularly in budgeting and cost allocation; duplication of regulatory requirements, like assessments and fingerprinting by public agencies; and a significant disparity in salaries between certified teachers employed by CBO and those employed by the school system. This gap will be even larger with the new teacher's contract in the public schools.



Finally, early childhood advocates seized the opportunity to announce several programmatic steps towards building a cohesive system. This year New York City is one of 26 communities to be granted a Federal Early Learning Opportunities Grant, with the United Way serving as primary grantee and the ECSG as an active partner to promote collaboration and blended funding. The other partners are Citizen's Committee for Children and the Agenda for Children Tomorrow. The Early Learning Council will engage government, non-profit and private stakeholders to forge a more unified early care and education system. At the same time, the project will focus on several targeted communities to better coordinate neighborhood planning and access to services.

In addition, a Blended Funding Committee, hosted by the New York City school system, will continue to consider collaboration issues relevant to UPK. Finally, the Early Childhood Strategic Group has developed a Resource Center as a vehicle for the CBO community to uncover challenges and forge solutions to collaboration. The Strategic Group, in collaboration with the Office of Early Childhood Education and the Office of Contract Management, is poised to publish a Frequently Asked Questions manual addressing the rules and regulations governing the implementation of the UPK program.

The Need for Collaborative Leadership in Early Education

The Forum began with a panel of representatives from city agencies and community-based organizations. **Eleanor Greig Ukoli**, Director of the Office of Early Childhood Education at the New York City school system, declared at the forum that "We are making history" with rapid expansion of the collaborative UPK program. The New York City school system, she noted, is no longer the center of the educational universe—the leaders of Community-Based Organizations are playing important roles in making UPK work. Including other voices in the UPK decision-making process has resulted in resounding successes for the UPK program, she said, and the school system is committed to continued strategies of collaboration and inclusivity. For example, some school districts' principals are currently visiting their community-based UPK partners, and both groups are reaching out to more effectively involve parents. Answers to overcoming UPK obstacles, concluded Ukoli, can emerge from multiple sources—as long as there is genuine mutual respect between all those seated at the table.

Harvey Newman, Deputy Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services, noted that, were he to post his personal motto, it would read: "Collaboration: It's Worth the Effort." Historically, said Newman, the term "collaboration" in government has been pejorative, implying consorting with the enemy. Now it is better understood as a way of improving services to children and their families in the community. Collaborative efforts—epitomized by the UPK program in New York City—yield greater results and save money long-term. The whole "is more than the sum of its parts," Newman concluded, and effective

partnerships provide a long-term, steady base for a successful early childhood education system.

Dorothy Cusack, Early Education Director in Community School District 11, lauded collaboration from her viewpoint at the local level. Developing UPK in District 11 and elsewhere is a systems-building mission, said Cusack. In District 11, located in the Northeast Bronx, the program is housed exclusively in CBOs. Community School District officials and CBO providers build mutual respect by meeting constantly and emphasizing mutual ownership of the project. They are also building stronger linkages between CBO Directors and area school Principals. Together, they have focused on recruitment and budgeting issues, as well as on programmatic issues like curricula, best practices, and current research in the field.

Providers: UPK Is a Success Story

Felicia Robinson, Director of the Herbert G. Birch Services Preschool Special Education Program, recalled participating in a Universal Prekindergarten forum three years ago, and commented on how the crowd has grown since that time. For 25 years, Birch has provided services to special needs children. In addition to Head Start and child care, the agency now offers Universal Prekindergarten. The UPK/Special Education program at Birch initially served 20 children; currently it serves 84. It is a uniquely integrated, full-day, full-year program, in which both special needs and typically developing children receive Universal Prekindergarten services and participate in extended hours funded by the Agency for Child Development, while those eligible also receive special education enhancements throughout the day. Robinson enumerated the obstacles to this model, which include the necessity of convincing the special education community that a program can serve typically developing children without relegating special needs children to lower status. Conversely, parents of typically developing children must be educated about the unique resources available in a special education program, including daily access to psychologists, social workers, and speech pathologists, as well as literacy and technology consultants to supplement classroom learning.

Like other providers, Robinson cited the difficulty of blending funding, particularly in this unique model, in which budgets cannot be clearly delineated by splitting the day between funding streams. To other providers, however, she says, "Don't be Scared!"—the innovation is both possible and worthwhile. The outcome is a positive experience for both parents and children, all of whom become more tolerant of the diversity around them.

Susan Feingold, Director of the Bloomingdale Family Program Head Start, noted that Head Start and UPK funds have been blended in the field since the very inception of the UPK program in New York City. Initially serving 36 children, Bloomingdale's collaborative program now cares for 84 children and offers extended hours. Head Start, historically a three-hour-per-day program, cannot single-handedly meet the needs of working parents. New UPK funding would ordinarily add an additional two and one half hours of care—but given economies of scale, Bloomingdale has managed to stretch the new funding to cover a total of seven hours of care. The program can also afford to remain open forty days more than the New York City school system requires for UPK. Community School District 3 has seen a real coming together of partners to build the program, Feingold said, and is moving toward development of a truly exemplary early childhood program for New York City.

Leonard Fennell, President of the Professional Association of Day Care Directors of New York City, an organization representing more than 350 child care programs, observed that over 250 programs funded by the Agency for Child Development are providing Universal Prekindergarten services. Directors of these programs have used UPK funding to hire full-time aids; extend program hours; hire family workers, social workers, and evaluations consultants; fund staff development and conferences; and purchase supplies and equipment.

The UPK/Child Care programs, according to Fennell, are "forging ahead, but not always sure of how to proceed." Given the newness of the program, some programs are wary of new evaluations and regulations. The challenge for the program will be to establish guidelines for collaboration, which will encourage programs to creatively deploy their UPK funding. At the same time, the program must continue to struggle to address the following barriers:

- Inconsistent contracting guidelines
- Late contracting, preventing CBOs from planning effectively

- Salary disparities between CBO teachers and school system teachers
- Inconsistent recruitment procedures: some CBOs can recruit, while others must wait for the District to send them students
- Inconsistent enrollment procedures: some Districts serve only students living within their boundaries, while others are less restrictive
- Duplication of program assessments and fingerprinting requirements

On the positive side, the program has already successfully resolved many issues, including duplication of medical forms and attendance records. The New York City school system should continue to set guidelines and to streamline the contracting system, Fennell said. He also thanked the advocacy community for fighting for the UPK program, and asked that the community continue to think comprehensively about the needs of three-, four-, and five-year-olds.

The UPK Contracting Process

Alan Friedman, Deputy Administrator of the Office of Contract Management at the New York City school system, shared recent developments in how the school system processes UPK contracts. He emphasized that collaboration relies heavily on communication. Three central premises are:

1. Each of the 32 School District Superintendents manages the UPK program, and the central office defers to their judgment.
2. In the Districts where programs receive funding from several different public sources, it is critical that programs carefully indicate sources of funding.
3. UPK money cannot be "carried over" from year to year, but must be spent during the year for which it is allocated.

New Technology

The school system is using computer technology to facilitate communication with the CBO community regarding the contracting process. Friedman guided Forum participants through the school system's Office of Purchasing Management Website (http://www.nycenet.edu/opm/), through which providers can track the status of their contracts. Details on how to use the many resources available on the website are available in two documents distributed at the forum and available from

the school system: "A Vendor's Guide for Providing Professional Services to the New York City Public Schools," and "New York City Public Schools Registration of Contracts for Services and Commodities: A Users Guide for Community School Districts & Responsibility Centers." UPK-specific documents, including answers to many frequently asked questions and several ECSG publications, can also be found at http://www.nycenet.edu/opm/vendor/uprekinfor.html.

The school system is currently reviewing its budget guidelines, and is working to refine definitions of various expense categories. In the meantime, Friedman said, CBOs should seek technical assistance and negotiate specifics with their Community School District officials. The school system will question gray areas, he observed, so all expenses should be presented with a rationale for their inclusion.

Following Mr. Friedman's presentation, workshops were held to address specific challenges and share potential solutions. School system/CBO teams coordinated the workshops. The topics were "Creative Budgeting" and "Recruitment and Enrollment."

Effective Budgeting

Two teams of participants, with representatives from Community School Districts and Community Based Organizations, came together in the "Effective Budgeting" workshop to share how they have successfully blended funding from different sources and to identify remaining budget challenges.

Dorothy Cusack, Director of Early Childhood for Community School District 11, opened the workshop by reminding the participants of two important questions they must ask themselves when it comes to budgeting: "What do we do?" And, "What is our rationale for budget items?" When providers can answer these questions themselves, the contracting process goes more smoothly.

Cusack pointed out that the UPK budgeting process is constantly evolving at both the District and central levels. Providers should be assured that if projected

expenses are not strictly correct, they may be adjusted at the mid-year budget. Items such as teacher salaries, fringe benefits and executive director salaries may be questioned in the budget, but they are a means of creating stability in programs, and if they are properly justified they may be approved.

On the subject of enhancements, Cusack urged providers to survey the classroom site and to take proactive steps to create a better environment. Items such as equipment and non-instructional supplies are essential in this regard. The Miscellaneous category can be used for itemized enhancements, including such items as travel expenses, advertising, enrichment (art, music and drama), staff development, tuition reimbursement, insurance, etc. Organizations should also have their accountants pro-rate the overhead costs of electricity, equipment, and other resources that are used for non-UPK purposes. Finally, programs should budget for higher costs at start-up (for equipment, e.g.); in later years, this extra capital can be spent on other things, like staff development and direct services to children.

Charlie Rosen, Executive Director of the Goose Bay Nursery School and Gloria Wise Boys and Girls Clubs in Community School District 11, has faced a number of obstacles in blending UPK funds with other sources. There is no standard operating procedure for UPK budgeting, Rosen observed; rather, each District makes its own rules. Organizations therefore must forge good working relationships with their Districts and be able to negotiate with them. For example, allowable program square footage is often a negotiated issue. The gross square footage of a school, said Rosen, includes the adult bathroom, hallways, etc. in addition to the actual classroom space. Programs may need to negotiate with the District to win reimbursement for these non-program areas. Improvements to program space may also be UPK negotiable. While funding does not cover capital items, it does cover repairs. Rosen urged providers to be creative in categorizing expenses, and to include all of the program's expenses, including field trips, travel, and insurance, which can be cost allocated in UPK's "miscellaneous" budget category. All possible funds are needed by the programs to bolster the salaries and fringe benefits they can offer their teachers.

Carmela Cohen, Early Childhood Supervisor of Community School District 16, views the UPK program as an opportunity to enrich services for children, and encourages expenditures on enhancements, particularly in programs also funded

by the Agency for Child Development (ACD). District 16, she said, holds leadership meetings to discuss how to improve the program for children, and was able to provide a rich family-support system by using UPK dollars to hire part-time family assistants and social workers. Monthly professional development training for the family assistants, who are often shared with other programs, also provides a strong community support system. Like several other speakers, Cohen stressed the importance of creativity in collaborating with other organizations. In her District, for example, they have worked with the Brooklyn Center for the Environment and NYU Community Arts Team to bring enrichment to children. From Cohen's perspective, the intent of the UPK legislation is to provide quality services. Her District's ultimate goal is to move all UPK programs to community-based organizations to maximize use of all resources.

Zadie Davis, Director of the Tabernacle Day Care Center in Community School District 16, has had an overwhelmingly positive experience bringing the UPK program to her ACD-funded center. Using the new UPK resources, Tabernacle was able to increase its staff by extending the hours of part-time aides in the classroom. They have also been able to order new classroom supplies, increase the number of educational trips and parent participation and increase children's exposure to dance, music and art curricula. Finally, when Tabernacle joined UPK, District 16 shared its social worker with the program. Davis noted that the District has been very helpful in easing transitions and providing answers to questions. Teachers in Tabernacle's Non-UPK classrooms now want to become part of the UPK program, and there is a long waiting list for the program.

Recruitment and Enrollment

As the UPK program expands, it is important to clarify how recruitment and enrollment can be managed more effectively. This session focused on strategies used by Community School Districts and individual CBOs.

Speakers in the Recruitment and Enrollment workshop, including **Catherine Gustaitis** and **Linda Blackstock,** from Community School Districts 20 and 10, respectively, strongly endorsed close working relationships between CSDs and CBOs. The two should be collaborating to fill seats, not competing for students,

said the speakers. For example, local schools may share their waiting lists with CBOs. This is an issue CBOs may consider taking up with their CSDs.

Karen Worshel, Director of the Marble Hill Nursery School District, introduced another important theme in administration of the UPK program: blended funding. Worshel noted that her program gives preference for enrollment in UPK to children who were in the three-year-old classes in the Nursery School. This strategy allows her to easily blend private tuition with UPK funds, which her program uses to make quality enhancements.

The high quality of the program, speakers agreed, is its own best advertisement. **Alice Mulligan,** Director of Our Saviour Lutheran Preschool, noted in the workshop that her preschool has expanded its rolls since it began to offer UPK services, often simply through word of mouth. This year, Mulligan used a lottery system for spaces at her program, and actually had to turn down some applicants for the program.

Recruitment can nonetheless be challenging for UPK programs. Some CSDs handle recruitment centrally, while in other Districts CBOs take part in the process. In Districts where CBOs can recruit their own students, inexpensive strategies include placing advertisements in local newspapers and church bulletins, distributing flyers, posting openings in local libraries, and hosting open houses.

Enrollment procedures also vary across Districts. Worshel noted that while in the first year the District handled enrollment of the children, the school itself now handles all enrollment. This has been vital to Marble Hill's success in building relationships with parents. All speakers expressed the hope that the central school system would be able to ultimately streamline both recruitment and enrollment, leading to the most effective use of resources to fill UPK seats.

Conclusions

The Forum on Universal Prekindergarten offered Community School Districts and Community Based Organizations the opportunity to share technical strategies for collaborative implementation of the UPK program in New York City. These included budgeting techniques, contracting requirements, and strategies for effective recruitment and enrollment. On a broader level, the forum also helped to surface some of the remaining obstacles to collaboration, emphasizing the continued need for communication, flexibility and openness. The mutual commitment of all partners to collaboration, agreed the speakers, is the critical ingredient to bringing quality early childhood education to the children of New York City.

Further Resources

New York City School System's Office of Purchasing Management (OPM) Website

- http://www.nycenet.edu/opm/
  To track the status of contracts using Tax ID, choose "Contract Registration/Status." Also review vendor information.

- http://www.nycenet.edu/opm/vendor/uprekinfor.html
  Review UPK-specific documents, including answers to many frequently asked questions and several ECSG publications.

Early Childhood Strategic Group Publications

- Available for free download on the Center for Early Care and Education Website http://www.ceceny.org/publications.php

- Or order hard copies from Child Care, Inc.
  http://www.childcareinc.org/shop/publications/universal_prek.php

- Or call the ECSG at (212) 929-7604 ext. 3036

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